

Kim Il-sung

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## North Korea: The Dynasty Takes Shape

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In ruling North Korea since 1945, Kim Il-sung has developed a degree of personal control and a personality cult second to none. So central is Kim's position within North Korea that his departure will usher in a period of considerable uncertainty. Conscious of this probability and of the denigration that beset Mao and Stalin after their deaths, Kim is seeking to preserve his place in history and to ensure the continuation of his policies through an elaborate succession scheme unprecedented in the Communist world.

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For nearly a decade, Kim Il-sung, who will be 70 next month, has groomed Kim Chong-il, his eldest son, as his heir. This process was first carried out in a campaign meant to be evident only inside North Korea; public acknowledgment finally came at the regime's Sixth Party Congress in 1980. While initially moving in the shadow of his father, the younger Kim, who turned 40 last month, now is exercising increasing control over day-to-day political and economic affairs as a senior member of the party. He may assume a high government post when P'yongyang's parliament convenes in March or in conjunction with the extensive festivities planned for Kim Il-sung's birthday in April. Kim Il-sung's apparent intent is to blend his own image with that of his son in such a way that the eventual transfer of power will be viewed as both natural and ordained.

The deliberate pace at which the son has been advanced augurs against an early succession as long as the elder Kim's evident good health persists. It also reflects the father's recognition of the extensive time needed to convince a party, government, and military hierarchy long committed only to "Kim Il-sung leadership" that his son has the requisite talents, personality, and vision to lead the country. There is no evidence that the succession scheme has generated



*Kim Chong-il at the Sixth Party Congress. (U)*

active opposition, although there clearly is sensitivity to the possible impact on foreign policy. Neither China nor the USSR seem pleased with this dynastic approach, and Kim Chong-il continues to be shielded from contact with foreign leaders.

The extensive internal control mechanisms in the North and the time already invested in the process make the likelihood of a Kim Chong-il succession relatively strong. With an orderly and gradual transition, we would expect to see—at least initially—considerable continuity:

- Hostility toward the South and the United States.
- Commitment to reunification on P'yongyang's terms.
- Maintenance of military strength at the expense of social and economic development.
- Stress on self reliance.

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But the younger Kim's accession to power will involve a number of uncertainties whenever it occurs. He will not be able to replace his father in image, role, or charisma and will therefore have to deal with a leadership group less subservient than under Kim Il-song. Kim Chong-il will also be inheriting policies that have been essentially frustrated or unfulfilled. We know too little about Kim Chong-il to predict how he may react to internal or external pressures without the authority and guidance of his father behind him. Given his relative youth and lack of experience, he could prove impulsive. Conversely, weakness or incompetence on his part could touch off an internal power struggle. Kim Il-song has clearly considered both possibilities and has sought, through the lengthy and elaborate tutorial process, to minimize the prospect of either occurring.

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